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Herrman, Arthur

The great question of  
skilled labor

New York

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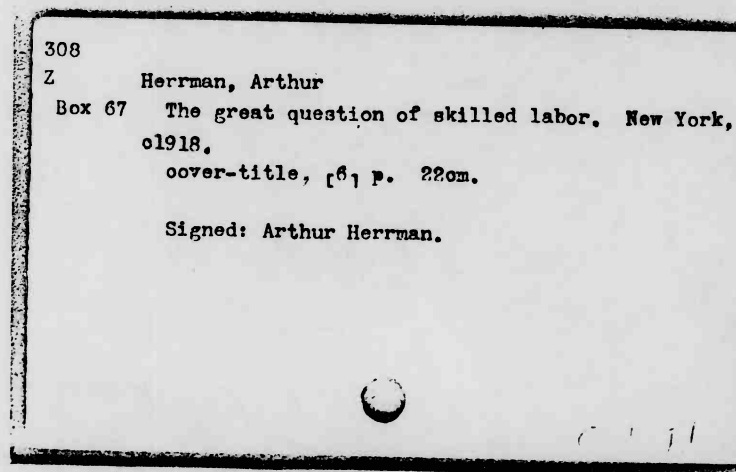
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# The Great Question of Skilled Labor

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Copyright 1918  
By ARTHUR HERRMAN  
1239 First Avenue  
New York

March 1920 - C.R.W.

## The Great Question of Skilled Labor

There are great lamentations in our industries, and the general complaint is everywhere **WE ARE SHORT OF SKILLED LABOR**, and every good American, who is interested in the present and future welfare of our Country, must turn his eyes upon this very vital and important question, must believe and admit, that it is nothing but the truth, **WE HAVE NOT THE QUANTITY NOR THE QUALITY OF SKILLED WORKERS**, THIS COUNTRY IS ENTITLED and I dare say COMPELLED TO HAVE.

### Ridiculous Suggestions

We frequently find in times like these articles written by some fiction writer or by some president of some great industrial association, tempering with labor problems, offering this and offering that as a remedy to obtain the quantity of skilled labor, but most of those suggestions will fail and never answer the real purpose, because they are not practical and will not produce the desired results. "Get the raw material," says one, "get the men the way you can get them, there are plenty here and train them. "Thank you," says the manufacturer and contractor, "I only estimated the cost of material and labor and did not figure school and experimenting expenses, furthermore I must complete the orders on a certain date or within a certain time."—"Open training schools in your plants and factories," says the other, and again the same answer, "Our investments are to manufacture and not to gamble, as we have no guarantee whatsoever, that the person so trained will stay in our employ, and we do not feel like training mechanics for someone else, and therefore these and similar suggestions are worthless. The problem of

obtaining skilled American workers for America must be dealt with fundamentally and systematically, not for a certain interest, not for a certain industry, but in the interest of the whole Nation and in the real interest of our future generations. IT IS A BIG TASK AND MUST BE DEALT ON A BIG SCALE.

## Establishment of Compulsory Apprenticeship

Only a few days have been consumed by the Congress of the United States to create a Law under which every male citizen of the United States from 21 to 31 must appear before a Board of Registry and later for examination to be drafted in the United States Army. Nowhere in the world can we see a law more respected than this one has been and is, and so are many others. Once it becomes a law, we are able to carry out our problematical plans without any difficulty and I cannot see, why every boy in the United States past 15 could not be compelled to learn one certain thing. Let him go to College, or let him take up or learn Agriculture, a skilled trade, but he and his parents on a certain day must decide, what useful profession or trade he is going to take up. We must establish Federal and State Commissions of skilled trades. Let there be a uniform agreement all over the Country, which should bind the boy and his employer for a period of 2 or 3 years. Let there be a mutual interest for both parties; let the employer know, that making a good mechanic of the boy is his moral and financial interest; let the boy know that by spending 2 or 3 years and mastering the skill of one certain trade, he must become an expert, useful to himself and likewise to the community.

Let him know now before it is too late, that even here in the United States one can

become not only a conductor, elevator man, letter carrier or policeman, but that he also can and must be a good American cabinet-maker, blacksmith, boilermaker, machinist, coppersmith, sheet metal worker, or some other useful and well paid mechanic, who absolutely must obtain years of thorough and intensive training.

Let the future of American boys be controlled and guided by law, the superstructure of all developments, let American boyhood be elevated to a higher standard and our reformatories will be abandoned. No more 16-year-old boy in the Sing Sing death house, no more crowded children courts, no more flat burglaries, no more hang-outs on corners, no more cadets, no more white slavery and no more hundreds of other evils, which unfortunately always have been taken as a matter of course and as natural, but in fact: **IGNORANCE AND LACK OF INTEREST AND CONTROL IN THE MENTAL CONDITION OF OUR BOYS IS FILLING OUR PRISONS TO OVERFLOWING.**

## Danger of Changing Occupations

We will often hear one ask the other, "what are you doing now, John?" "Driving a truck." A few months later John cannot obtain a position, then again he is a shipping clerk, changing occupations about ten times in three years. Then he finds out, he is nobody and has to deliver his soul and body to the highest bidder without will power and without self-respect. He often will go and tell you, that yes, he is a machinist or latter a lathe hand, but the employer or his foreman will quickly find out, that John has done his best to bluff, because he wants a living and must get a job.

And here where the chaos comes in to procure skilled labor and even proper executives. Here you will see very often a

superintendent of a certain factory, who had absolutely no technical or mechanical training whatsoever, having the power of employing and discharging skilled mechanics. Here you will see employing departments of certain factories with rows of benches where men are sitting all day, filling out applications to obtain employment, and this is going on year in and year out, our industrial life gives the impression of an agency and here I must say: **THAT UNLESS THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA WILL TRAIN AND HAVE HER OWN SKILLED WORKERS IN EVERY TRADE, WE CANNOT CALL OURSELVES A NATION OF INDUSTRY, ONLY AN IMMENSE AGENCY OF FOREIGN MECHANICS.**

## **Metal Trade Back-bone of Industry**

Just one glance in the Metal Trade, the backbone of all industries will tell us how poor and helpless we are in skilled labor. Go wherever you please, visit the large plants of the Country, for instance, Western Electric Co., The Westinghouse Plants, Machine Factories, Chandelier Houses or any other line, in which solid and sheet metal work on large scale is manufactured, and what will you see? 80% first class foreign skilled workers, they are certainly welcome, they have a fair existence, they enjoy all the privileges as well as the native Americans. But for our own sake we must ask, why should the native American not enjoy the same fair existence by giving him a compulsory chance to learn one certain trade and making him a master of himself and a strong link in the chain of our National Industrial Life. It is impossible to train a man of age for a certain trade, you can only break him in to make a certain part, thus making a human machine of him instead of a skilled mechanic. To get good workers, we must begin with the boy early.

## **Urgent Need of Compulsory Apprenticeship**

At the present we are at war, there is only guesswork and imagination as far as the termination of this war is concerned, but we positively do know, that some day this war will come to an end and then, what can we expect? An endless exodus of our best stock of skilled workers. They will turn to their native lands by the hundreds of thousands, of course this also could be discouraged honestly and intelligently, but we must begin to do it, and here is the chance now for the real captains of industry to show, that they are good Americans, because **REMEMBER! IT WILL TAKE YEARS, BEFORE THE PORTS OF THE UNITED STATES WILL LAND THE USUAL NUMBER OF FOREIGN LABOR, SKILLED AND UN-SKILLED.**

There will be an immediate call for them from over there, and when they will return, they will carry with them the spirit of America, the only universal slogan will be: **"LIBERTE" EGALITE" FRATERNITE"** and there will be all the chances available for them in war worn Europe just as good as here.

Our developed mines, mills, factories and shops will be abandoned, only partly manned, the fake employment agencies and the fake trade schools will not be able to fool both sides, the laborer and the employer, there will be no readers of fake advertisements and I fear, that the capacity of our producing power will fall back both, in quality and in quantity, and the only solution would be the immediate creation of a Federal and State Law, compelling apprenticeship and the erection of Public Technical Schools connected with permanent **EXHIBITIONS OF ARTS AND METIERS.**

## Evolution of a new Industrial Aera

Imagine the Army of American Boys engaged in all the skilled trades. Picture the happy mothers knowing, that the future welfare of their sons is constructed on a solid basis. American youth will mature morally in general and to think of: that the future creators of America will be real Americans is something more than Ideal, and it is the absolute duty of every American citizen, Legislator and Statesman to strive, THAT COMPULSORY APPRENTICESHIP SHALL SOON COME TO REALIZATION ALL OVER THE UNITED STATES.

*Arthur Herriman*



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